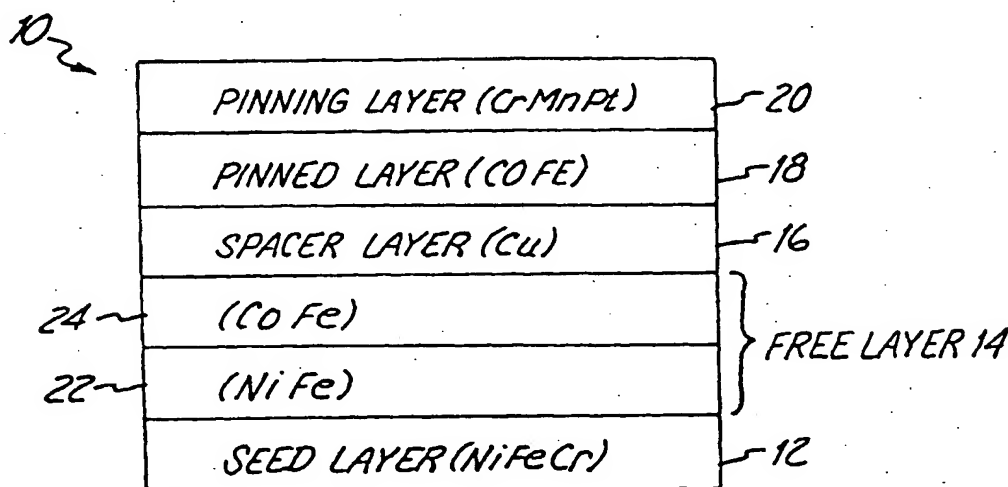


**PCT**WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION  
International Bureau

## INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification <sup>7</sup> : <b>G01R 33/09</b>	<b>A1</b>	(11) International Publication Number: <b>WO 00/63714</b> (43) International Publication Date: <b>26 October 2000 (26.10.00)</b>
(21) International Application Number: <b>PCT/US99/19278</b> (22) International Filing Date: <b>25 August 1999 (25.08.99)</b> (30) Priority Data: <b>60/130,204</b> <b>20 April 1999 (20.04.99)</b> <b>US</b> (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): <b>SEAGATE TECHNOLOGY LLC [US/US]; 920 Disc Drive, Scotts Valley, CA 95067-0360 (US).</b> (72) Inventors; and (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): <b>GAO, Zheng [CN/US]; 5200 West 102nd Street, Bloomington, MN 55437 (US). MAO, Sining [CN/US]; 13927 Aquila Avenue, Savage, MN 55378 (US). XUE, Song, S. [CN/US]; 10382 Mooer Lane, Eden Prairie, MN 55347 (US).</b> (74) Agent: <b>FAIRBAIRN, David, R.; Kinney &amp; Lange, P.A., Kinney &amp; Lange Building, 312 South Third Street, Minneapolis, MN 55415-1002 (US).</b>		(81) Designated States: <b>DE, GB, JP, KR, SG, US.</b>  <b>Published</b> <i>With international search report.</i>

(54) Title: **GIANT MAGNETORESISTIVE SENSOR WITH A CrMnPt PINNING LAYER AND A NiFeCr SEED LAYER**

## (57) Abstract

A giant magnetoresistive stack (10) for use in a magnetic read head includes a NiFeCr seed layer (12), a ferromagnetic free layer (14), a nonmagnetic spacer layer (16), a ferromagnetic pinned layer (18), and a CrMnPt pinning layer (20). The ferromagnetic free layer (14) has a rotatable magnetic moment and is positioned adjacent to the NiFeCr seed layer (12). The ferromagnetic pinned layer (18) has a fixed magnetic moment and is positioned adjacent to the CrMnPt pinning layer (20). The nonmagnetic spacer layer (16) is positioned between the free layer (14) and the pinned layer (18).

**FOR THE PURPOSES OF INFORMATION ONLY**

Codes used to identify States party to the PCT on the front pages of pamphlets publishing international applications under the PCT

AL	Albania	ES	Spain	LS	Lesotho	SI	Slovenia
AM	Armenia	FI	Finland	LT	Lithuania	SK	Slovakia
AT	Austria	FR	France	LU	Luxembourg	SN	Senegal
AU	Australia	GA	Gabon	LV	Latvia	SZ	Swaziland
AZ	Azerbaijan	GB	United Kingdom	MC	Monaco	TD	Chad
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina	GE	Georgia	MD	Republic of Moldova	TG	Togo
BB	Barbados	GH	Ghana	MG	Madagascar	TJ	Tajikistan
BE	Belgium	GN	Guinea	MK	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	TM	Turkmenistan
BF	Burkina Faso	GR	Greece	ML	Mali	TR	Turkey
BG	Bulgaria	HU	Hungary	MN	Mongolia	TT	Trinidad and Tobago
BJ	Benin	IE	Ireland	MR	Mauritania	UA	Ukraine
BR	Brazil	IL	Israel	MW	Malawi	UG	Uganda
BY	Belarus	IS	Iceland	MX	Mexico	US	United States of America
CA	Canada	IT	Italy	NE	Niger	UZ	Uzbekistan
CF	Central African Republic	JP	Japan	NL	Netherlands	VN	Viet Nam
CG	Congo	KE	Kenya	NO	Norway	YU	Yugoslavia
CH	Switzerland	KG	Kyrgyzstan	NZ	New Zealand	ZW	Zimbabwe
CI	Côte d'Ivoire	KP	Democratic People's Republic of Korea	PL	Poland		
CM	Cameroon	KR	Republic of Korea	PT	Portugal		
CN	China	KZ	Kazakstan	RO	Romania		
CU	Cuba	LC	Saint Lucia	RU	Russian Federation		
CZ	Czech Republic	LI	Liechtenstein	SD	Sudan		
DE	Germany	LK	Sri Lanka	SE	Sweden		
DK	Denmark	LR	Liberia	SG	Singapore		
EE	Estonia						

- 1 -

## GIANT MAGNETORESISTIVE SENSOR WITH A CRMNPT PINNING LAYER AND A NIFECR SEED LAYER

### BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to a giant  
5 magnetoresistive sensor for use in a magnetic read head. In particular,  
the present invention relates to a giant magnetoresistive read sensor  
having enhanced giant magnetoresistive responses and improved  
magnetic stability.

Giant magnetoresistive (GMR) read sensors are used in  
10 magnetic data storage systems to detect magnetically-encoded  
information stored on a magnetic data storage medium such as a  
magnetic disc. A time-dependent magnetic field from a magnetic  
medium directly modulates the resistivity of the GMR read sensor. A  
change in resistance of the GMR read sensor can be detected by  
15 passing a sense current through the GMR read sensor and measuring  
the voltage across the GMR read sensor. The resulting signal can be  
used to recover the encoded information from the magnetic medium.

A typical GMR read sensor configuration is the GMR spin  
valve, in which the GMR read sensor is a multi-layered structure formed  
20 of a nonmagnetic spacer layer positioned between a ferromagnetic  
pinned layer and a ferromagnetic free layer. The magnetization of the  
pinned layer is fixed in a predetermined direction, typically normal to an  
air bearing surface of the GMR read sensor, while the magnetization of  
the free layer rotates freely in response to an external magnetic field.  
25 The resistance of the GMR read sensor varies as a function of an angle  
formed between the magnetization direction of the free layer and the  
magnetization direction of the pinned layer. This multi-layered spin  
valve configuration allows for a more pronounced magnetoresistive  
effect, i.e. greater sensitivity and higher total change in resistance, than  
30 is possible with anisotropic magnetoresistive (AMR) read sensors, which  
generally consist of a single ferromagnetic layer.

- 2 -

A pinning layer is typically exchange coupled to the pinned layer to fix the magnetization of the pinned layer in a predetermined direction. The pinning layer is typically formed of an antiferromagnetic material. In antiferromagnetic materials, the magnetic moments of adjacent atoms point in opposite directions and, thus, there is no net magnetic moment in the material. It is desirable for the pinning layer material to have a high blocking temperature, the temperature at which the exchange coupling disappears. It is also desirable for the pinning layer material to have a low annealing temperature, the temperature at which the pinning and pinned layers are exchange coupled during manufacturing, to control magnetic behavior and prevent diffusion between thin layers in the GMR spin valve.

A seed layer is typically used to promote the texture and enhance the grain growth of the free layer consequently grown on top of it. The seed layer material is chosen such that its atomic structure, or arrangement, corresponds with the preferred crystallographic direction of the magnetization of the free layer material.

One principal concern in the performance of GMR read sensors is the maximum absolute change in resistance of the GMR read sensor, which directly affects the GMR ratio. GMR ratio (the maximum absolute change in resistance of the GMR read sensor divided by the resistance of the GMR read sensor multiplied by 100%) determines the magnetoresistive effect of the GMR read sensor. Ultimately, a higher GMR ratio yields a GMR read sensor with a greater magnetoresistive effect which is capable of detecting information from a magnetic medium with a higher linear density of data.

Key determinants of the GMR ratio are the materials used as the pinning layer and as the seed layer in the GMR read sensor. A pinning layer material with a low annealing temperature makes it possible to use a thinner free layer which decreases the resistance of the GMR read sensor which in turn increases the GMR ratio. Also, a seed layer material that causes specular scattering and spin filter effect

- 3 -

at the seed layer and free layer interface increases the change in resistance of the GMR read sensor which increases the GMR ratio.

Accordingly, there is a need for a GMR read sensor with a higher GMR ratio and for an antiferromagnetic material with a high blocking temperature and a low annealing temperature for use as a pinning layer.

#### BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a giant magnetoresistive stack for use in a magnetic read head. The giant magnetoresistive stack includes a NiFeCr seed layer, a ferromagnetic free layer, a nonmagnetic spacer layer, a ferromagnetic pinned layer, and a CrMnPt pinning layer. The free layer has a rotatable magnetic moment and is positioned adjacent to the NiFeCr seed layer. The pinned layer has a fixed magnetic moment and is positioned adjacent to the CrMnPt pinning layer. The spacer layer is positioned between the free layer and the pinned layer. In a first preferred embodiment, the free layer is a NiFe/CoFe bilayer, the spacer layer is formed of copper, and the pinned layer is formed of CoFe. In a second preferred embodiment, the free layer is a NiFe/CoFe bilayer, the spacer layer is formed of copper, and the pinned layer is a CoFe/Ru/CoFe synthetic antiferromagnet.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a layer diagram of a first embodiment of a giant magnetoresistive stack of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a graph of the GMR response of the first embodiment of a giant magnetoresistive stack of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a layer diagram of a second embodiment of a giant magnetoresistive stack of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a graph of the GMR response of the second embodiment of a giant magnetoresistive stack of the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a graph of the blocking temperature measurement of a CrMnPt pinning layer.

- 4 -

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 is a layer diagram of a first embodiment of a giant magnetoresistive (GMR) stack 10 of the present invention. GMR stack 10 includes a seed layer 12, a free layer 14, a spacer layer 16, a pinned layer 18, and a pinning layer 20. Seed layer 12 is NiFeCr. Free layer 14 includes a first ferromagnetic material 22, preferably NiFe, and a second ferromagnetic material 24, preferably CoFe, and is positioned such that the first ferromagnetic layer 22 is adjacent to seed layer 12. Pinned layer 18 is a ferromagnetic material, preferably CoFe, and is positioned adjacent to pinning layer 20. Pinning layer 20 is CrMnPt. Spacer layer 16 is a nonmagnetic material, preferably copper, and is positioned between free layer 14 and pinned layer 18.

The magnetization of pinned layer 18 is fixed in a predetermined direction while the magnetization of free layer 14 rotates freely in response to an external magnetic field emanating from a magnetic medium. The magnetization of pinned layer 18 is pinned by exchange coupling pinning layer 20 with pinned layer 18. Pinning layer 20 has a blocking temperature of about 340°C and an annealing temperature of about 230°C. The atomic structure of seed layer 12 is face-centered cubic (fcc) which promotes the [111] crystallographic texture and enhances the grain growth of free layer 14. The resistance of GMR stack 10 varies as a function of an angle that is formed between the magnetization of free layer 14 and the magnetization of pinned layer 18.

The composition of seed layer 12 is preferably in the range of about Ni(60)Fe(15)Cr(25) to about Ni(48)Fe(12)Cr(40), and more preferably approximately Ni(48)Fe(12)Cr(40), where the numbers in parentheses represent atomic percentage. The thickness of seed layer 12 is preferably in the range of about 20Å to about 60Å, and more preferably in the range of about 45Å to about 50Å.

The composition of the first ferromagnetic layer 22 of free layer 14 is preferably in the range of about Ni(85)Fe(15) to about

- 5 -

Ni(80.5)Fe(19.5), and more preferably approximately Ni(82)Fe(18). The thickness of the first ferromagnetic layer 22 of free layer 14 is preferably in the range of about 20Å to about 100Å, and more preferably approximately 30Å. The composition of the second ferromagnetic layer 24 of free layer 14 is preferably approximately Co(90)Fe(10). The thickness of the second ferromagnetic layer 24 of free layer 14 is preferably in the range of about 5Å to about 25Å, and more preferably approximately 13Å.

The thickness of spacer layer 16 is preferably in the range of about 20Å to about 35Å, and more preferably approximately 24Å.

The composition of pinned layer 18 is preferably approximately Co(90)Fe(10). The thickness of pinned layer 18 is preferably in the range of about 20Å to about 30Å, and more preferably approximately 25Å.

The composition of pinning layer 20 is preferably in the range of about Cr(30)Mn(67)Pt(3) to about Cr(50)Mn(35)Pt(15), and more preferably approximately Cr(43)Mn(50)Pt(7). The thickness of pinning layer 20 is preferably approximately 250Å.

FIG. 2 is a graph of the GMR response of GMR stack 10 of the present invention. The graph shows both the GMR ratio and the resistance ( $\Omega$ ) of GMR stack 10 as a function of an applied magnetic field (Oe). The GMR ratio of GMR stack 10 equals 12.9 %. The maximum absolute change in sheet resistance of GMR stack 10 equals 2.35  $\Omega/\text{sq}$ .

FIG. 3 is a layer diagram of a second embodiment of a GMR stack 30 of the present invention. GMR stack 30 includes a seed layer 32, a free layer 34, a spacer layer 36, a pinned layer 38, and a pinning layer 40. Seed layer 32 is NiFeCr. Free layer 34 includes a first ferromagnetic layer 42, preferably NiFe, and a second ferromagnetic layer 44, preferably CoFe, and is positioned such that the first ferromagnetic layer 42 is adjacent to seed layer 32. Pinned layer 38 is a synthetic antiferromagnet and includes first and second ferromagnetic

- 6 -

layers 46 and 50, both preferably CoFe, and a coupling layer 48, preferably ruthenium, positioned between first and second ferromagnetic layers 46 and 50, and is positioned such that the second ferromagnetic layer 50 is adjacent to pinning layer 40. Pinning layer 40 is CrMnPt. Spacer layer 36 is a nonmagnetic material, preferably copper, and is positioned between free layer 34 and pinned layer 38.

The magnetization of pinned layer 38 is fixed in a predetermined direction while the magnetization of free layer 34 rotates freely in response to an external magnetic field emanating from a magnetic medium. The magnetization of pinned layer 38 is pinned by exchange coupling pinned layer 38 with pinning layer 40. Pinning layer 40 has a blocking temperature of about 340°C and an annealing temperature of about 230°C. The atomic structure of seed layer 32 is face-centered cubic (fcc) which promotes the [111] crystallographic texture and enhances the grain growth of free layer 34. The resistance of GMR stack 30 varies as a function of an angle that is formed between the magnetization of free layer 34 and the magnetization of pinned layer 38.

The composition of seed layer 32 is preferably in the range of about Ni(60)Fe(15)Cr(25) to about Ni(48)Fe(12)Cr(40), and more preferably approximately Ni(48)Fe(12)Cr(40). The thickness of seed layer 32 is preferably in the range of about 20Å to about 60Å, and more preferably in the range of about 45Å to about 50Å.

The composition of the first ferromagnetic layer 42 of free layer 34 is preferably in the range of about Ni(85)Fe(15) to about Ni(80.5)Fe(19.5), and more preferably approximately Ni(82)Fe(18). The thickness of the first ferromagnetic layer 42 of free layer 34 is preferably in the range of about 20Å to about 100Å, and more preferably approximately 30Å. The composition of the second ferromagnetic layer 44 of free layer 34 is preferably approximately Co(90)Fe(10). The thickness of the second ferromagnetic layer 44 of free layer 34 is



- 7 -

preferably in the range of about 5Å to about 25Å, and more preferably approximately 13Å.

The thickness of spacer layer 36 is preferably in the range of about 20Å to about 35Å, and more preferably approximately 24Å.

5           The compositions of the first and second ferromagnetic layers 46 and 50 of pinned layer 38 are both preferably approximately Co(90)Fe(10). The thicknesses of the first and second ferromagnetic layers 46 and 50 of pinned layer 38 are both preferably in the range of about 15Å to about 40Å, and more preferably in the range of about 25Å to about 30Å. The thickness of coupling layer 48 of pinned layer 38 is preferably in the range of about 8Å to about 12Å.

10           The composition of pinning layer 40 is preferably in the range of about Cr(30)Mn(67)Pt(3) to about Cr(50)Mn(35)Pt(15), and more preferably approximately Cr(43)Mn(50)Pt(7). The thickness of pinning layer 40 is preferably approximately 150Å.

15           FIG. 4 is a graph of the GMR response of GMR stack 30 of the present invention. The graph shows both the GMR ratio and the resistance ( $\Omega$ ) of GMR stack 30 as a function of an applied magnetic field (Oe). The GMR ratio of GMR stack 30 equals 12.0 %. The maximum absolute change in sheet resistance of GMR stack 30 equals 1.9  $\Omega$ /sq.

20           FIG. 5 is a graph of the blocking temperature measurement of a CrMnPt pinning layer. The graph shows the strength of the exchange coupling (Oe) as a function of temperature ( $^{\circ}$ C). At 340 $^{\circ}$ C, the strength of the exchange coupling becomes 0 Oe.

25           In summary, the present invention introduces a GMR read sensor with a CrMnPt pinning layer and a NiFeCr seed layer. This configuration exhibits a GMR ratio of at least 12 %, the highest ever reported in simple top spin valves. In addition, the CrMnPt pinning layer has a high blocking temperature of about 340 $^{\circ}$ C to prevent the exchange coupling from disappearing. Also, the CrMnPt pinning layer has a low annealing temperature of about 230 $^{\circ}$ C to control magnetic

- 8 -

behavior and prevent diffusion between thin layers in the GMR read sensor during manufacturing.

Although the present invention has been described with reference to preferred embodiments, workers skilled in the art will  
5 recognize that changes may be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

- 9 -

## CLAIMS:

1. A read sensor for use in a magnetic read head, the read sensor comprising:
  - a giant magnetoresistive stack; and
  - 5 means for causing the giant magnetoresistive stack to exhibit a GMR ratio of at least 12%.
2. The read sensor of claim 1 wherein the giant magnetoresistive stack includes:
  - a ferromagnetic free layer having a rotatable magnetic
  - 10 moment; and
  - a ferromagnetic pinned layer having a fixed magnetic moment.
3. The read sensor of claim 1 wherein the means for causing the stack to exhibit a GMR ratio of at least 12% includes a NiFeCr seed
- 15 layer.
4. The read sensor of claim 1 wherein the means for causing the stack to exhibit a GMR ratio of at least 12% includes a CrMnPt pinning layer.
5. A giant magnetoresistive stack for use in a magnetic read
- 20 head, the giant magnetoresistive stack comprising:
  - a NiFeCr seed layer;
  - a ferromagnetic free layer having a rotatable magnetic moment positioned adjacent to the seed layer;
  - a ferromagnetic pinned layer having a fixed magnetic
  - 25 moment;
  - a CrMnPt pinning layer positioned adjacent to the pinned layer; and
  - a nonmagnetic spacer layer positioned between the free layer and the pinned layer.
- 30 6. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 5 wherein the pinned layer is CoFe.

- 10 -

7. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 5 wherein the pinned layer is a synthetic antiferromagnet.
8. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 7 wherein the synthetic antiferromagnet comprises:
- 5 a first CoFe layer positioned adjacent to the spacer layer;  
a second CoFe layer positioned adjacent to the pinning layer; and  
a ruthenium layer positioned between the first and second CoFe layers.
- 10 9. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 8 wherein:  
the first and second CoFe layers have thicknesses in a range of about 15Å to about 40Å; and  
the ruthenium layer has a thickness in a range of about 8Å to about 12Å.
- 15 10. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 5 wherein the free layer is a bilayer.
11. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 10 wherein the bilayer comprises:
- 20 a NiFe layer positioned adjacent to the seed layer; and  
a CoFe layer positioned adjacent to the spacer layer.
12. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 11 wherein:  
the NiFe layer has a thickness in a range of about 20Å to about 100Å; and  
the CoFe layer has a thickness in a range of about 5Å to about 25Å.
- 25 13. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 5 wherein the seed layer has a thickness in a range of about 20Å to about 60Å.
14. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 13 wherein the thickness of the seed layer is in a range of about 45Å to about 50Å.

30

- 11 -

15. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 5 wherein the seed layer has a Cr atomic percentage of between about 25 and about 40.
16. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 5 wherein the pinned layer has a thickness in a range of about 20Å to about 30Å.
17. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 5 wherein the pinning layer has a thickness in a range of about 150Å to about 250Å.
18. The giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 17 wherein the pinning layer has a Pt atomic percentage of between about 3 and about 15.
19. A method for forming a giant magnetoresistive stack for use in a magnetic read head, the method comprising:  
depositing a seed layer of NiFeCr;  
depositing a free layer of a ferromagnetic material having a magnetic moment over the seed layer;  
depositing a spacer layer of a nonmagnetic material over the free layer;  
depositing a pinned layer of a ferromagnetic material having a magnetic moment over the spacer layer;  
and  
depositing a pinning layer of CrMnPt over the pinned layer.
20. The method for forming a giant magnetoresistive stack of claim 19 wherein:  
the seed layer has a thickness in a range of about 20Å to about 60Å; and  
the pinning layer has a thickness in a range of about 150Å to about 250Å.

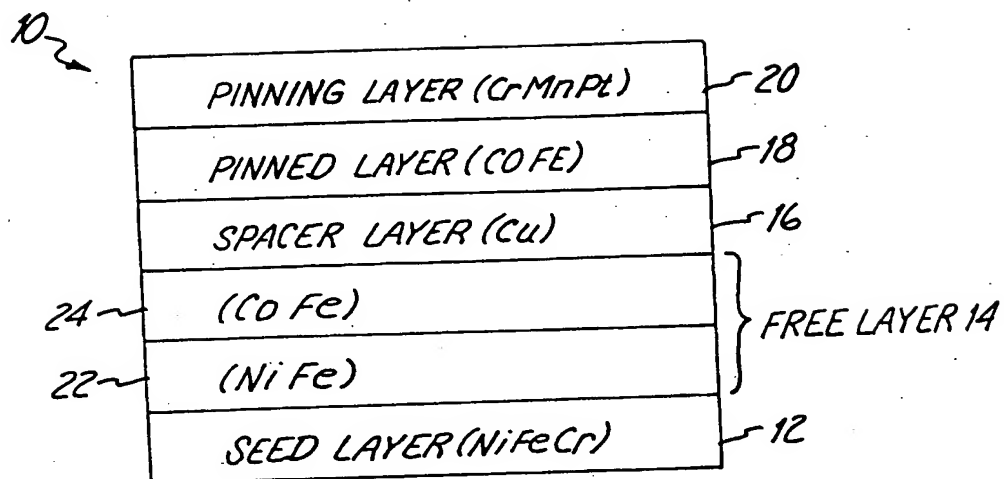


Fig. 1

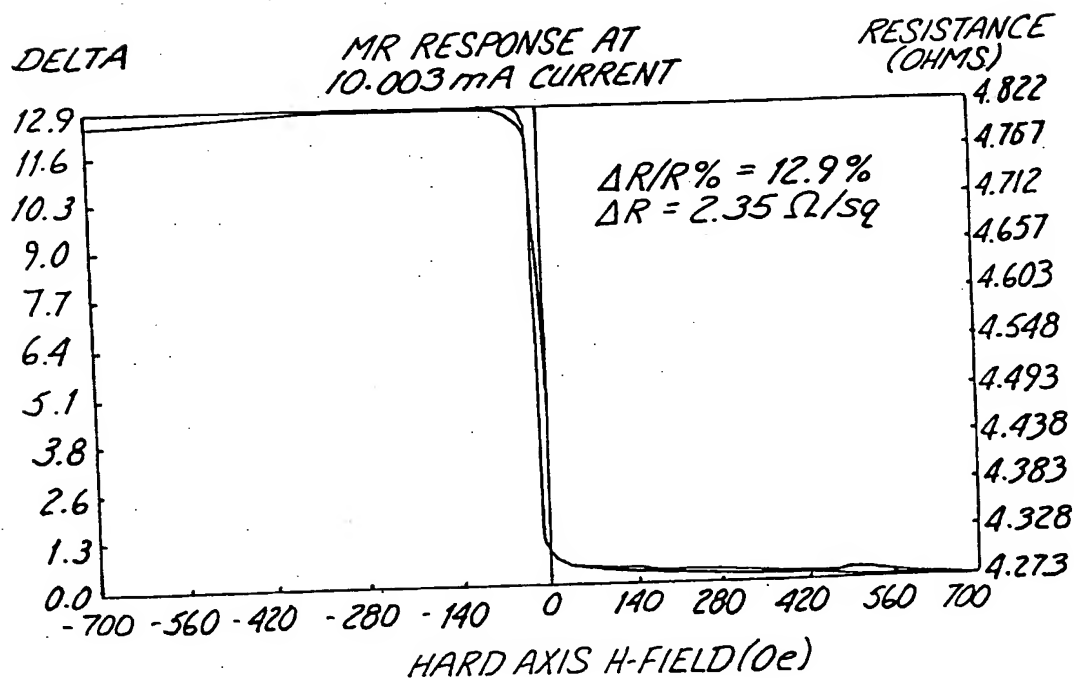


Fig. 2

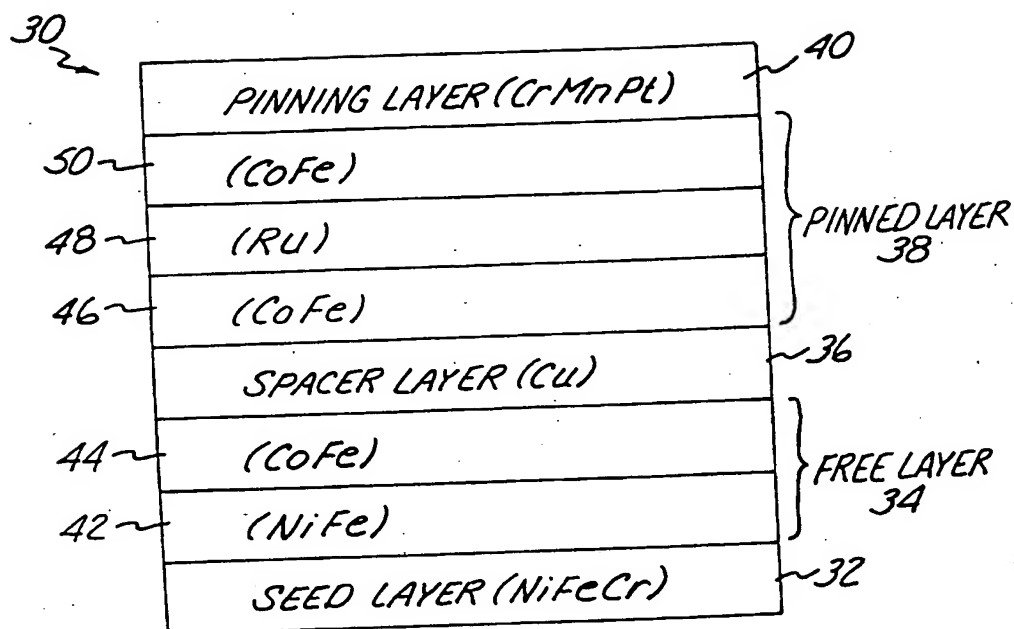


Fig. 3

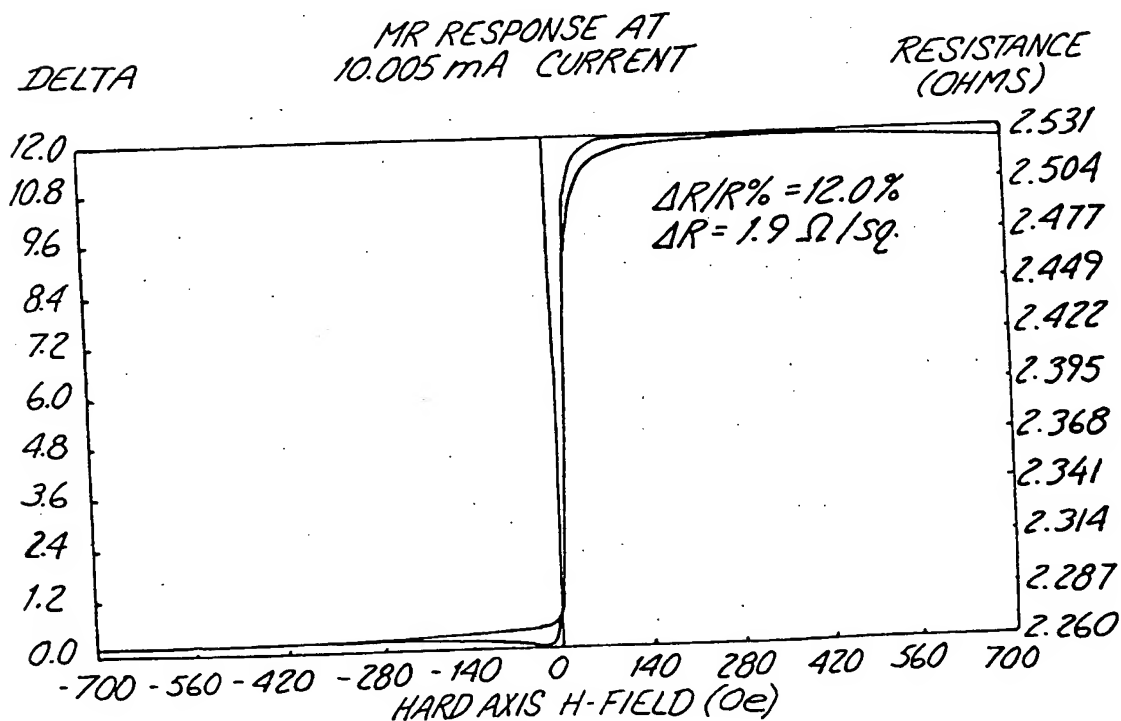


Fig. 4

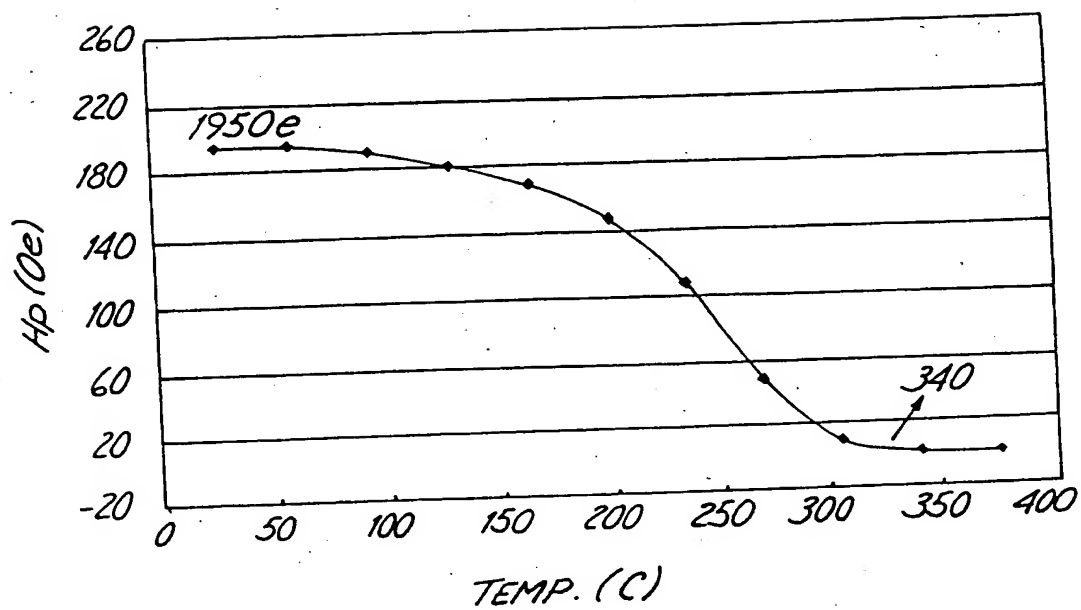


Fig. 5